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## Galaxy Crash and Fallout

**A**stronomers announced yesterday that they had found the remains of an ancient cosmic car wreck.

Using the Chandra X-ray Observatory to probe beneath the pearly placid surface of a galaxy by the name of NGC 4261, 100 million light-years from here, astronomers from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics discovered a trail of intense X-ray hot spots strung 50,000 light-years across space "like beads on a necklace," in the words of Dr. Andreas Zezas.

The X-rays, Dr. Zezas said, appear to come from gas heated to high energies as it falls into black holes and neutron stars. Those dense objects, the astronomers theorize, are remnants of huge stars that formed along the so-called tidal streams of gas produced when two galaxies collided a few billion years ago. The smaller galaxy was pulled apart, leaving the larger with a deceptively serene and regular appearance.

The results, the astronomers said, lend credence to a theory that such galaxies, called ellipticals, are a result of violent mergers.

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